Council Highlights: Feruary 2002

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COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS is intended to provide quick updates on issues of interest to members and affiliates of the Council of Ontario Universities (COU). It is produced regularly throughout the academic year.

This issue covers the months of January and February 2002.

Applications from Ontario secondary school students on the rise again

The demand for university education continues to escalate. The number of applications for 2002 full-time, first-year admission from Ontario secondary school students has increased by 15.8%. The Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC) has completed processing these applications, which had been received by the deadline date of November 30, 2001. While a small number of late applications will continue to be received, as of February 1, 2002, there were 9,461 more individual applicants seeking admission this year compared to the same time last year.

Also noteworthy is the number of applicants who have selected more than three different universities or programs. With an increase in multiple applications of 34.3%, for a total of 73,895 choices beyond three, it is clear that many applicants "may feel the need to increase their chances of being admitted this year," says Gregory Marcotte, Executive Director of OUAC. Further analysis of the applicant pool also found that the percentage of total applicants who are 18 years old has increased by 6.8 percentage points, with the actual number more than doubling – increasing from 5,073 last year to 10,558 this year. This indicates that some students accelerated their secondary school program to get to university before the peak double cohort class in 2003.

This year, almost 3,000 secondary school students took advantage of OUAC's convenient application option – its pilot online, automated application process. The Centre is anticipating that at least 50% of next year's estimated 105,000 applicants will apply on the web. This time-saving application option will be crucial in handling next year's double cohort, when the Centre hopes to be able to process twice the number of applications within roughly the same time frame as this year.

Universities seek assurance on full funding

With enrolment growth in 2001-2002 approximately double previous forecasts, universities are seeking reassurance from the Minister of Finance that government will provide its full share of funding for all new students, regardless of their increasing numbers. Although it is good news that more Ontarians are seeking the high level of education so valuable to our economy and society, the increases signal a pressing need for immediate action. The lead story of the latest edition (Vol. 5, No. 1) of the COU newsletter *For the Record* provides up-to-date information on planning for the double cohort and the surge in enrolment. It describes the progress to date and the remaining steps that must be taken to provide Ontario students with a quality education. Visit www.cou.on.ca for a copy of the newsletter.

Progress Report from Ontario Universities released

COU recently released *Access to Excellence: A Progress Report from Ontario Universities*, a15-page brief that evaluates advances made through joint government-university efforts over the past three years to prepare for the enrolment surge. The brief details the many important steps that have been taken to increase enrolment capacity but it also cautions that much more must be done to ensure access to excellence. For copy of the brief, visit the COU web site (www.cou.on.ca).

Council poses questions to PC candidates

COU has sent a letter, along with the brief *Access to Excellence: A Progress Report from Ontario Universities*, to all five candidates running for the Progressive Conservative Leadership. The letter presents a series of questions that are uppermost in the minds of those concerned with the future of education in this province and relate to public support of university teaching and research. The areas of concern include the affordability and attainability of a quality university education; the importance of faculty-student interaction and keeping faculty-student ratios more in line with those of other jurisdictions; and ensuring that all qualified and motivated students have access to higher education regardless of growing numbers. Candidates have been asked to respond by the end of February.

Update on the double cohort and new secondary school curriculum

The increase in the number of graduates from Ontario's secondary schools during the transition to the new curriculum has led to public concern about two issues related to university-bound students: Will there be room to accommodate all applicants? Will the difference in credentials provide an advantage to one group of students over the other?

To address the second issue, the universities of Ontario and the provincial government prepared a set of questions and answers that will be sent to school guidance counsellors and made available to students to aid them in planning their postsecondary careers, as well as the following statement of guiding principles:

STATEMENT

In order to give guidance to students and to provide reassurance, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and the Council of Ontario Universities have agreed on the following points and guidelines concerning university admission in 2003.

The universities of Ontario and the provincial government have been working together for the past six years to plan for the double cohort. The universities participated in the validation of the OSS curriculum and are confident that students graduating from the new program are as well prepared as their OAC counterparts for university studies.

The universities and the government are committed to the principle that, regardless of their program of studies, or when they entered high school, students' chances of gaining admission to university will be the same.

The government remains committed to ensuring that there will be enough spaces for all willing and qualified applicants and in the May 2001 budget provided for an additional $217.8 million in operating funds by 2003-04 to finance approximately 31,500 new student places in Ontario's universities. In addition, the government and universities have committed over $1.1 billion in capital investment to increase the physical capacity to handle the increased number of students.

The government and the universities will continue to monitor the implementation of the new secondary school curriculum. It is important to note that grades are not always the sole determinant of admission to an institution or to a particular program, and universities will exercise judgement in the admission process to ensure that all students are treated fairly.

Survey on factors that influence students' choice of university underway

COU, in concert with the Acumen Research Group, is undertaking a survey of all first-year undergraduate applicants to Ontario universities to determine the factors that influence their decision-making processes in choosing an institution. The results of the study will enable institutions to better address students' information and service needs, as well as assist COU in its advocacy and research efforts.

A steering committee, with participation from Acumen and representation from a number of Ontario universities, will provide advice on the content and administration of the survey. This survey, which builds on the work of Acumen's University Applicant Survey that has been conducted for some institutions since 1997, will cost-effectively expand its reach to include more universities and more prospective students. The survey will be distributed in March, and its findings are expected in early summer 2002.

College-University Consortium Council hosts forum in March

On March 25, 2002, the College-University Consortium Council (CUCC) will host the CUCC Forum at the Regal Constellation Hotel in Toronto. The forum will focus on the current state of articulation and credit transfer arrangements in Ontario and examine current thinking about future developments. Bringing together representatives of the postsecondary community, government and other interested parties, the forum should also help clarify the future direction of CUCC in its role of promoting and facilitating joint learning opportunities between colleges and universities across the province.

Kevin Costante, Deputy Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, will present the keynote address. A number of distinguished speakers will also be featured, including David Baime, Vice-President, American Association of Community Colleges; Mireille Duguay, Chief Executive Officer, Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission; and Dr. Frank Gelin, Executive Director, British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer; as well as several presidents of Ontario colleges and universities. Approaches to college-university partnership today; articulation and credit transfer in the Canadian East and West and in the U.S.; and the future of college-university partnership in Ontario will be topics for discussion.

For program information or registration, contact Murray Genoe, Director, CUCC, at (705) 748-1011 ext. 1686 or cucc@flemingc.on.ca; or visit the CUCC web site (www.cou.on.ca/cucc/).

Findings of the Equity Survey of university applicants to be posted

The Standing Committee on Employment and Educational Equity and the Standing Committee on the Status of Women in Ontario Universities are near completion of their work on the Equity Survey. Prior to this survey, little information was known about the special needs of designated groups – Aboriginal Peoples of Canada, members of visible minority groups, people with disabilities and women – before they arrive on campus and, consequently, the services required to meet their needs. The survey's findings will help institutions to provide services and flag areas of concern. The findings also demonstrate that Ontario universities are generally accessible.

The survey's response rate of 18.4% and the high number of responses (17,403) provided some baseline data that can be used as a starting point for understanding the characteristics of the applicant pool. A copy of the report will be posted on the COU web site (www.cou.on.ca) by late March. Committee members have recommended including Equity Survey-type questions in future University Applicant Surveys.

OUAC responds to increased demand for information on admission guidelines

In the beginning of each academic year, OUAC distributes almost 250,000 copies of *INFO* magazine to Ontario secondary school students who are considering admission to university. Published by the Standing Committee on Secondary School Liaison of the Ontario University Registrars' Association, with the collaboration of the Centre and COU, *INFO* magazine is the comprehensive guide to Ontario universities for Ontario secondary schools students in Grade 12 in the new curriculum and those still earning Ontario Academic Credits (OACs).

In early December, however, the secondary school guidance community requested general information that could be distributed to Grade 9, 10 and 11 students. Concerns surrounding the new curriculum and the double cohort have prompted younger students and their parents to seek information that could help students select the courses necessary for university admission in the

future. To meet this growing need for more detailed admission information, the Application Centre produced and distributed 311,000 copies of a tabloid-sized "offprint" of the 59-page key article entitled "Admission Guidelines and Programs of Study Chart" from the fall 2001 issue of *INFO*. These offprints arrived in the schools in the first week of January in time to remind students of their options prior to their course registration for next year's courses, as well to assist guidance counsellors across the province in their work helping students through this period.

Ontarians want more doctors and nurses in the system, says survey

On January 21, 2002, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care released an opinion survey that details Ontarians' priorities for the future direction of health care. The most important priority, as identified by the people of Ontario, was increasing the number of doctors and nurses in the system. After that, the priorities identified were improving access to early diagnostic tools, placing more emphasis on wellness and reducing waiting lists. The survey was mailed to four million households in the province last July and August, and 400,000 Ontarians responded – a response rate three times higher than the normal rate of response for a government direct-mail initiative.

Information sessions on double cohort scheduled

Many high schools throughout the province are organizing information sessions on the double cohort for students and parents, to which university representatives are invited. One of the largest to date was held at Nelson School Council in Burlington on February 6, 2001. Over 1,200 individuals attended the evening information session, where a number of areas of concern as they relate to the double graduating class of 2002 were discussed, including admission standards, entrance scholarships and bursaries, physical infrastructure and government-funding levels.

Report of the Standing Committee on Space Standards and Reporting

The COU Standing Committee on Space Standards and Reporting presented a report at a meeting of Council on February 15, 2002. The report noted that the Standing Committee's current major activities consist of conducting the 2001-2002 triennial inventory report and reviewing various standards, which include classroom space, laboratory space, office space and libraries. It also noted that a paper *Where Are We Going to Put Them?* relating the role of space standards in matters pertaining to university planning, space management and financial resources was presented at the conference of the Canadian Association of University Business Officers in June 2001. As part of the Standing Committee's mandate, space standards are reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure that they remain current.